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# Cooperative Woodland Management and Marketing in Southeastern Iowa

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CONSIDERABLE interest has developed in Southeastern Iowa in the prospects of cooperative production and marketing of woodland products. In this paper the history of Iowa timber is briefly sketched, and the possibilities of cooperative efforts among farmers is discussed.

Farm Forestry in Iowa seems like an unimportant subject to the uninformed, but history shows that not only were the early homes, barns, and storebuildings built of Iowa timber, but hundreds of wood-working industries using Iowa wood grew up and flourished for decades in the State. A great many of these industries no longer exist; some have converted their factories to produce other than wood products; but many still operate. However, few of the latter depend upon Iowa forests for their logs.

Wood-using industries which are now operating in Iowa depend for most of their raw material on lumber, usually in a finished form, shipped in from remote regions at shipping charges, which in the aggregate, amount to many millions of dollars a year. If it were possible for these industries to secure lumber from Iowa's farm forests they would benefit considerably by the saving on freight costs. The industries are consequently interested in any improvement made by the farmers in production and methods of harvesting and marketing their woodland crops.

BUT the farmers themselves would benefit by organization of their timber production and marketing! Some of the reasons why the farm forests of Iowa are not now regarded by their owners as of enough importance to justify much attention are

1. The poor condition of the farm forests due to depletion and

mistreatment; 2. Lack of accurate timber-volume figures which leave the farmer at the mercy of the timber buyer; 3. Limitation of markets due to the lack of knowledge of the utilization of native species; 4. Lack of experience in managing and marketing woods material; 5. The relatively small volume available from individual farm forests make it almost impossible to market the material; but even if a market is found the small volume brings unsatisfactory prices.

The farm forests have suffered greatly by culling, pasturing, fire and neglect. A farmer who wanted fence posts or fire-wood, for instance, would select the best formed trees of the best species, which should have been sold as high class logs, rather than using inferior, mis-shapen, wolf, diseased, insect-infested or dead trees for his posts and fuel.

By far the greatest damage to Iowa's woodlands has been from grazing by livestock resulting from the following factors: 1. Need of additional pasture. 2. No realization of damage to farm woods by grazing or the severity thereof. 3. No markets or unsatisfactory markets for woods products. 4. False valuation on timber as pasture. Fire has been a damaging factor principally due to intentional burning to "improve" them for pasture, spreading from field-burning, and carelessness. And still other timber tracts have just been left to grow into just anything they would—the mature trees left to decay and with the introduction naturally of a high percent of inferior species into the young growing-stock.

**N**OTABLE incidents are known of the sale by farmers of their timber to tie-outfits for ridiculously low prices. In some cases the buyers have made their contracts to pay 10c to 20c per tie, and have taken rough lumber in addition without any payment to the farmer. The lack of accurate volume tables has left the farmer ignorant of the value of the timber he sells.

But the fact that farmers may have full knowledge of timber production and may have high quality logs to market every year, or every few years, does not mean that they have been able to sell the logs for satisfactory prices. Although there are a few mills who take logs from farmers at fairly good prices for manufacture of such products as boxes, mine-props and ties, the volume involved is quite low. Of more consequence is that taken by portable mills to saw into rough lumber, however, at prices so low that farmers have no incentive to continue producing high quality logs. The efforts of the State Extension



*Logs can be cut from the farm woodland during the off-season and hauled to the cooperative's central collection point where they may be graded before going to local industries.*

Service have been directed to encourage farmers to value their woods as sources of fuelwood, posts, poles and other material needed on the farm, with only a slight emphasis on the production of wood to market due to the realization by extension foresters of the difficulties of marketing. However, within recent months investigations have been made into the possibilities of cooperative management and marketing of woodland products in southeast Iowa, especially with the view of giving aid to the organization movement.

This investigation has had the additional aim of finding ways of maintaining the stability of existing wood-using industries, aiding in the improvement of the farmers' condition by adding to their income, the advantage to be gained in conservation of water, soil, and wildlife, and the elimination of waste being experienced in the cutting and marketing of Iowa's timber at present.

The latter point may need further discussion under the subject of portable mills. These mills are undesirable because; 1. They buy timber in blocks rather than by the log and underpay the farmer; 2. They usually have poor equipment which is wasteful because it does not saw with precision and such material cannot be resold at a satisfactory price; 3. They do not have proper equipment for seasoning lumber; 4. They operate but a part of the year; 5. Their clear-cutting methods result in cutting immature trees, creating the problem of what to do with the land after cutting, loss of soil, water, recreational and game advantages, and compel the farmer to either crop or pasture the land when possibly it should not be; 6. They are financially unstable as many farmers do not get payment on their contracts; 7. They are unable to properly develop by-products; and 8. Their operators are usually of low managerial ability.

THE eight southeastern counties of Iowa by the 1935 Farm Census showed 348,982 acres of land in woodland distributed as follows:

County	Woodland Pasture*	Woodland not pastured	Total
Davis .....	39,593	2,430	42,023
Des Moines .....	33,653	2,171	35,824
Henry .....	28,906	1,057	29,963
Jefferson .....	30,410	1,174	31,584
Lee .....	71,950	2,349	74,299
Louisa .....	26,096	4,808	30,904
Van Buren .....	71,464	3,358	74,822
Washington .....	25,243	4,320	29,563
Total .....	327,315	21,667	348,982

\* Woodland pasture. Daniel Den Uyl and Ralph K. Day, in "Woodland Carrying Capacities and Grazing Injury Studies", Bulletin 391, Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station, say: "The result of a three-year series of tests to determine the actual carrying capacity of farm woods indicates that under grazing practices common to much of the better agricultural sections of the corn belt, the forage productivity of such areas is insufficient to maintain animal weights".

These figures do not include the hundreds of thousands of acres which have been unwisely cleared of timber and land so badly eroded that tree crops are the only ones practical to introduce thereupon.

The possible markets now existing for these counties are wood-using industries in such towns as Keokuk, Fort Madison, Burlington, Muscatine and Davenport in Iowa, Quincy, Warsaw, Rock Island and Moline in Illinois, and Hannibal in Mis-

souri. Manufacturers of furniture, baskets and other products in these cities have recently expressed great interest in the cooperative wood-producing movement.

SINCE some of the possible markets are in the two adjoining states of Illinois and Missouri, the farmers in those states who live in the trade territory of these towns should be interested in the cooperative scheme. James E. Davis, Extension Forester in Illinois, states that there is a total of 254,185 acres of Illinois woodlands within a 50-mile radius from Keokuk, Iowa. L. E. McCormick, Extension Forester in Missouri, states that in Missouri, there is a total of 225,987 acres of farm woodlands within a radius of 50 miles of Keokuk. The total woodlands in the three states in the fifty mile radius of Keokuk is 829,154 acres.

### **Proposed plan for woodland cooperatives**

The plan which seems most feasible is that of organizing sufficient woodland acreage to secure an effective forest management and efficient utilization unit. At the present no consideration would be given to milling the material, but the organization would merely produce and market the logs to mills or factories. Under the plan each woodlot would maintain its individual status with production therefrom controlled for the unit as a whole. Membership would be limited to woodland owners who manage their timber in accordance with the methods prescribed by the cooperatives.

Each member would pay a membership fee in advance, and upon directions from the Board of Directors, made up of members of the cooperative, would loan any amount up to the maximum established by the association, to the association for furthering or carrying on the work of the association. Such loans would draw interest and be repaid from a special fund created by charging for the services rendered by the association.

The cooperative would employ a full time forester and field man for full or part-time as the occasion demanded.

The objectives set by the cooperative for management would be, (a) To insure the improvement and the best utilization of the existing stands, and (b) to bring about the conditions which are most favorable for the sustained yield of high grade products from commercially important species.

The members of the cooperatives would be required to: (a) protect woods from fire, (b) eliminate grazing from the woods,

(c) cut only timber which has been marked by the cooperative's forester, (d) deliver all harvested material to the cooperative except that marked for home use, (e) follow all management practices recommended by the cooperative, and (f) cooperate in wildlife conservation.

Cuttings would be made either for stand improvement or harvest, but only after being marked by the forester. No clear cutting would be permitted. Natural reproduction would be favored with plantings made to supplement it.

In marketing, the object would be to keep contact with a variety of industries in order to get complete utilization and not to depend upon the sale of one type of product alone, and the elimination of wasteful manufacturing practices. The cooperative no doubt would set up assembly yards and maintain trucking facilities.

A cooperative organization of this character should get considerable assistance from outside sources in the form of educational and research resources. The Extension Services, state forestry departments, Soil Conservation Service, Agricultural Experiment Stations, forest experiment stations, state conservation departments, sportsmen's organizations, municipalities and the wood-using industries. All, no doubt, would be intensely interested in such an organization and be able to assist in many ways.

In conclusion it would be well to observe the success of cooperative woodland management by some Iowa communities, to determine if success of the proposed scheme is likely. Just to the northwest of the area outlined above for Iowa, and along the Iowa river, a community of seven villages of farm people has cooperatively managed about 11,000 acres of timber for 80 years or more, while at the same time making an outstanding success in farming. They have build all buildings in the villages from their timber. They maintain seven sawmills and cabinet shops that turn out high-grade furniture. Another group of men in Dubuque county operate 300 acres of woodland and have their own mill to supply their needs of lumber for buildings and furniture, and for posts and poles.

It is expected that a venture of this sort will have inestimatable value in the financial aid it will give the farmer and in the creation of a patchwork of farm communities consisting of prosperous fields, pastures and woodlands along with busy factories steadily employing hundreds of men and women at good wages.